'Snoopy' inspires Powder Puff win

TAMPA, Fla. — Patricia Udall and Nan Gaylord, who flew with a stuffed Snoopy dog as their mascot, finished first in the final running of the all-women Powder Puff Derby.

The 30th transcontinental derby flight of 140 planes, including some vintage aircraft and one antique, began Friday in Palm Springs and finished here Monday. The order of finish was announced Wednesday.

As they prepared to take off from Palm Springs, pilot Udall, a park ranger from Kayenta, Ariz., leaned out the plane's door and told a reporter, "Be sure you tell them that it's not the racing that is so important here. It's just finishing the derby and being with your friends. That's what is important."

Before boarding their plane on the runway there, co-pilot Gaylord of Denver, Colo., pulled her stuffed Snoopy dog mascot from his perch on the plane's propeller.

"He's been my mascot for years," she said with a smile, hugging the dog that was attired in flight cap, goggles and various ribbons and medals.

The final Powder Puff Derby was more of a commemorative flight than a race, with every participant guaranteed a trophy just for reaching the destination here. Derby officials said in 1976 they had held their last race, but were talked into one more flight by representatives of the Smithsonian Institution.

Institution officials wanted to include the derby in their aviation memorabilia, but needed the 30-year continuity to do so.In keeping with the idea of a commemorative flight, the women pilots flew over virtually the same route taken by the first derby fliers in 1947.

The pilots who finished in second through fifth place were all Californians, with only one out-of-state co-pilot in the group.

In second place was seven-time winner Fran Bera of Long Beach. Her co-pilot was Joyce Failing of Rolling Hills, a controller with the Federal Aviation Admininstration.

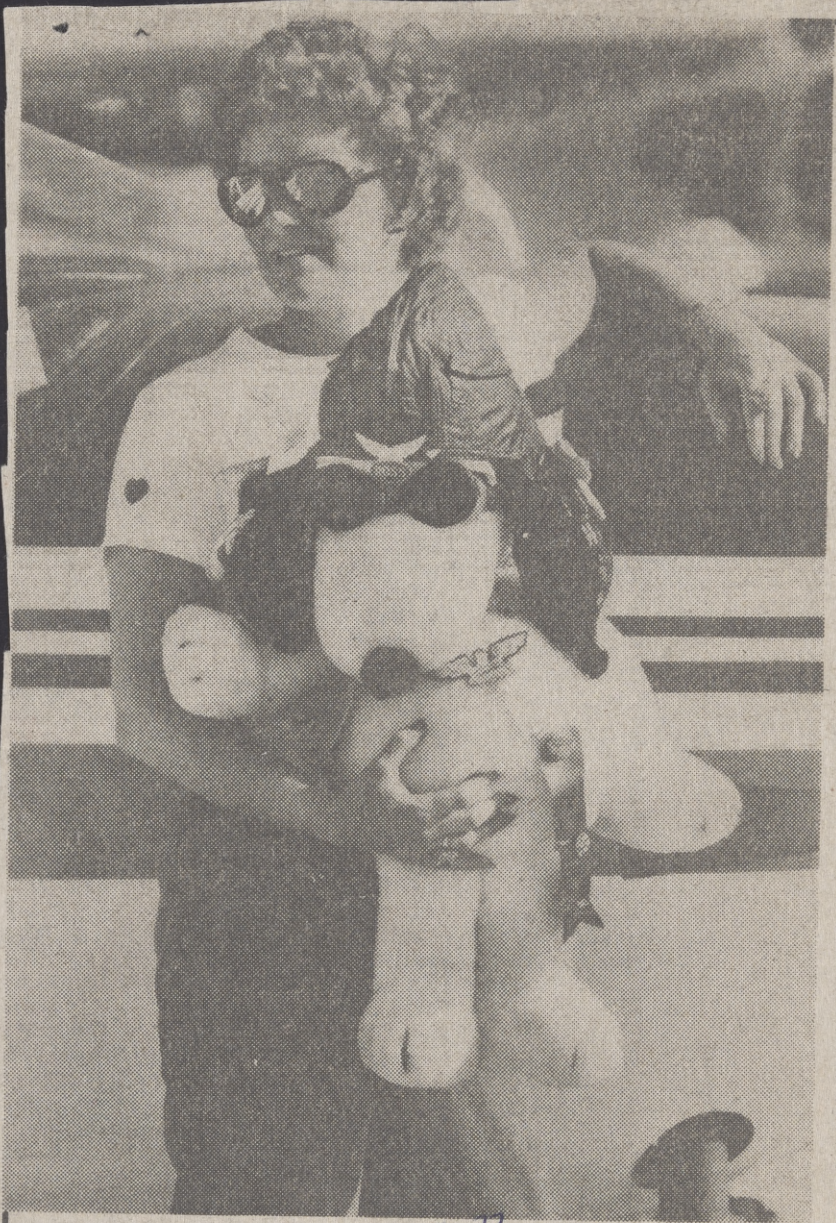
Finishing third were pilot Joan Paynter of Bakersfield and Shirley Tanner of Newport Beach. Thon Griffith of Costa Mesa and co-pilot Kay Brice of Norwood, N.J., placed fourth. In fifth place were pilotEileen Wyckoff from Vandenberg and Linda Schreck of Lompoc, who were flying in their first derby.

Of the 140 planes that began the race, 127 finished. Others dropped out due to mechanical problems and adverse weather conditions. At least one pilot, Melba Beard of Scottsdale, Ariz., entered the race expecting not to finish. She was flying a 48-year-old bi-plane, a Brunner Winkle Bird.

As the flight began she said she would fly only a short distance in her fragile, slow plane. She said the plane wouldn't hold up under a long flight.

"This is the type of plane that was in the first derby and I thought it was important that there be one in this last derby," the 70-year-old pilot said.

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Staff photo by John Metzger

Powder Puff winner Nan Gaylord and Snoopy. Page A-4.